
FOSM

Friends of Stanpit Marsh



Autumn 2023 #127



www.friendsofstanpitmarsh.org.uk

View from the Chair – *Alan Hopking*

Welcome to our last newsletter for 2023. I hope you all can look back in awe at the wildlife you've seen through the year.

But first, I report the sad loss of our friend and colleague, Terry Howes, who recently passed away after a period of illness. Over the years, the FOSM Committee regularly met at Terry's house in Friars Cliff. He loved the Marsh and was a regular Committee member for over 15 years. Our sympathies are with his family at this sad time.

I wonder if you've had an opportunity yet to go to hear the bellow and clash of antlers of the testosterone-fuelled red deer stags in the New Forest? Or seen the magic of mushrooms pushing through the fallen autumn leaves? And watch out in the coming weeks for the stunning sight of huge flocks of starlings as they swoop and swirl together in unison.

Last, but not least, at our AGM last month, Nina Blake stepped down from her position as FOSM events organiser, to pursue her other interests. Nina diligently built up the events until they were frequently oversubscribed. You're a star Nina! We'll miss you at Committee and hope you enjoy your new free time.

Have a wonderful Christmas-tide, and see you at the Centre at our special coffee morning for mulled wine and a mince pie!

Marsh smiles,
Alan (Chairman)

Warden's Snippets – *Robin Harley*

Site maintenance

New FOSM-funded signage is now being installed. These are the small signs asking people not to go beyond certain parts of the Marsh. Contractors are replacing the kissing gate at the Riversmeet end of the Marsh with a new metal version. This has given us the opportunity to make a new access from Riversmeet Meadow, as an alternative route to crossing the bridge along the cycle track.

Grazing

After a successful grazing season (with Nigel the stallion behaving himself), ponies will soon be removed from Priory Marsh and foals will be removed from the main site. We had to carry out some fence repairs after a foal got into the fenced area on Crouch Hill and then couldn't get out.

We also had a cow (Hulk) decide that the grass was greener in Ashtree Meadows, so decided to just walk through the fence. He is now secure, along with his two friends and they will be moooving back to Hengistbury at the end of October, having fulfilled their role.

Disturbance

Working with CHOG and South West Lakes Trust, we have been focusing on reducing disturbance from fly fisherman around Speller's Point and South Marsh, mainly them wading out within the buoys. More focussed bailiff patrols and checking of permits has helped reduce this relatively new use of the Marsh and is continuing.

Visitor Centre

The new open sign (funded by FOSM) is ready and we are just waiting for it to be installed. The volunteers had another successful colouring competition over the summer with lots of entries, which made judging more challenging. This has been a really good way to engage children and get them to make use of the centre. We also refreshed the log circle in the Forest School.

Surveys

General surveys of site wildlife have continued, with some new species being recorded in 2023. The annual butterfly transect recorded highest ever counts for several species, including Large White, Large Skipper, Holly Blue, Peacock and Red Admiral, the latter having had a really good season nationally. Rarities include Dark Green Fritillary butterfly on Riversmeet, Small Red-eyed Damselfly on Priory Marsh and the Tesellated Bee Burglar fly, a parasite of the Pantaloon Bee. With the help of Duke of Edinburgh students we have carried out a record count of Marsh Mallow flowering stems with a total of 5300!

Unexpected Sighting on Crouch Hill

- *Amanda Townshend*

On a lovely afternoon this past October, David, one of the Stanpit volunteer wardens, was treated to an unexpected sight - running just five metres in front of him on Crouch Hill was a weasel..... or was it a stoat? These small predators are usually very hard to spot and most sightings are just fleeting glimpses. Generally, weasels and stoats spend most of their time under cover to avoid large predators such as foxes and birds of prey. Luckily for David, however, he was treated to a twenty-minute viewing, with the animal out in the open and apparently unbothered by his presence.

Much debate took place via WhatsApp to make the ID as it wasn't at all obvious. Apparently, the easiest way to tell a weasel (*Mustela nivalis*) from a stoat (*Mustela erminea*) is the tail. A stoat's tail has a bushy black tip whilst a weasel's tail is short and stubby and solely brown in colour. The weasel also has brown patches on each side of the throat. The way it moves is also important - whilst stoats have a bounding gait with an arched back, the weasel is often quicker and moves flatter to the ground. Weasels are smaller(20-27cm) than stoats (30-40cm) and this can also help identification, although our animal appeared to be quite large adding an element of confusion!! Finally, the conclusion reached was that this was indeed a weasel.

David was able to take many fabulous pictures of this obliging creature which he has kindly shared and two are shown below.

Weasels have been seen at Stanpit a couple of times recently prior to David's sighting so do keep your eyes peeled – you might be in for a treat!



Events Review – *Nina Blake*

Hello everyone. Since our last review we have held our afternoon tea event at the Visitor Centre with John and Hettie's book stall, raffle and delicious cakes. We also raffled a lovely picture of two swans on a grey background which was kindly donated by a FOSM member. The winner was thrilled with the picture.

In September we held something unusual by having a combined Beetle Drive and Bingo evening which proved to be great fun and very successful. Everyone had a good laugh and really enjoyed the evening.

Your next event is a bird watching walk on the marsh with volunteer wardens Andrew and Christina. Wednesday 8th November at 10.30am £2 per person. Coffee afterwards. Phone Nina to book.

In December we'll have our annual festive coffee morning to round off the year with mulled wine and mince pies and raffle. Bring friends to enjoy a pre-Christmas get together. Hopefully with good weather.

At the AGM I stood down from organising events because, after nine years, I'm keen to pursue some of my other interests. The committee now has only five members so it will be difficult to have a programme of events without some new help from the membership. I'm very happy to support and guide anyone wanting to have a go at organising an event.

A huge thank you from me to all the lovely people who have supported and helped out in any way, be it putting out chairs and tables, doing teas, making cakes, donating raffle prizes, running the book stall, manning the raffle or hosting coffee mornings. You have all been absolutely fabulous!

I've really enjoyed arranging and hosting events and will still be a very active member of FOSM. You'll still see me around and hosting the odd coffee morning, so all the best until then..

A Tribute to Terry Howes – Lynn Howes



Ed's note: Terry was on the FOSM committee from May 2006. He became Vice-Chairman from October 2009, then Advisory Panel Rep working with Christchurch council from 2012. He became Membership Secretary in 2018 until 2022.

The tribute below is by Lynn, Terry's daughter.

Dad was kind, patient, generous and funny - we never argued. He was the ever-available taxi service for teenage activities, the handyman to fix small jobs around my house, and much later he was an amazing carer for mum and a sweet grandad to our children.

He was a positive person who found ways to like everyone and everything (with the exception of Compare the Market and We Buy Any Car adverts!) He loved nature – he overfed the birds and hedgehogs on a daily basis. He was active in FOSM and loved the Marsh and all the wildlife that visits it.

He loved his garden. One summer evening in 2020, we sat in his garden as a hedgehog came right up to him and sniffed his toes. His garden was full of nature – including ants nests in the wild lawn (good food for birds) and a family of rats (he insisted they were part

of nature too). All sizes and kinds of creatures were welcome from visiting cats to clever crows and ravenous seagulls that ate up leftover bread.

He loved his home – having found the house with mum. They enjoyed their retirement together there, welcoming family and friends with too much food. Dad travelled extensively in his life, both with the family and later on his own. SAGA river cruises in Austria were a favorite most recently, until the pandemic, and then his health made trips too difficult.

What a lovely, kind and generous soul he was - how lucky we all were to have known him.

(I don't think any of us who knew Terry through FOSM would argue with that. - Ed)

CHOG update – Valerie Kelly

Below are details of some of the recent conservation projects to which CHOG have contributed:

1) Following an unsuccessful attempt by a pair of Oystercatchers to breed there in 2019, CHOG and the BCP Countryside Team worked jointly to erect a permanent fence around an area at the northern end of Mudeford Sandbank, thereby offering an area of minimal disturbance to attract breeding waders, and to act as a bird refuge at high tide. Since the installation of the fencing, the enclosed area has been used by waders as a high tide roost. In 2023, a pair of Ringed Plovers nested within the enclosed area, the first to have bred in the Harbour for 40 years! Three eggs successfully hatched, and two of the youngsters survived - they eventually departed with the parent birds.

A further project was to extend the fence around Holloway's Dock on the Head to safeguard more of the Salt Hurns for wildlife.



Photo: David Taylor

In 2023, 150metres of fencing was added, funded by CHOG and a generous member contribution. Since then, greater numbers and species of birds have been recorded there

2) As previously reported, the Swift population has dramatically declined, due in part to PVC guttering and fascias, leaving no space for swifts to nest. In 2023, with the help from Hampshire Swifts, we fitted 10 new swift boxes locally, bringing the total number of available in our area to 27.

3) To reduce disturbance of birds in Stanpit Bight and Barn Bight from watercraft, 33 new yellow buoys were placed across the entrances to these areas, in conjunction with BCP Council and Bournemouth Water. Combined with the information on the Harbour signage, this initiative hopefully will considerably reduce the level of disturbance to wildlife in these two sensitive areas.

CHOG has been involved with the design and siting of signage to educate visitors about Harbour wildlife, helping them to appreciate the reasons for access restrictions. We also developed guidance for users of watercraft, along with information about the birds that depend on the Harbour, on our dedicated website page, <https://www.chog.org.uk/watercraftguide/> .

For information about joining CHOG please visit www.chog.org.uk . Why not buy a membership for someone as a Christmas present?

Seasonal goings-on in the garden

– Sheila Richards

Ivy flower feeders

The other day there were lots of ivy bees and eight Red Admirals on my ivy flowers. What was surprising was that on two separate occasions I saw a bee chase off a butterfly! Maybe butterflies know that bees can sting, although this bee's sting is less painful than a nettle's. Perhaps the bee, only flying for a few weeks of the year, really didn't take kindly to the butterflies muscling in on its only food source!



Photo: Tony Wickham

Magpie nest

Apparently blown out of a tall fir tree. Long-time FOSM friend Ann Blofield identified it as a Magpie's nest as it includes mud, moss, sticks, twigs and horse hair in its construction. It's very big - they can be 50 to 75 centimetres and are usually domed with a side entrance.



Photo: Sheila Richards

Late butterflies

The late warm weather this year has kept butterflies going longer, especially Red Admiral and the Speckled Wood. Maybe the consequent later flowering of plants has helped by providing food for longer.

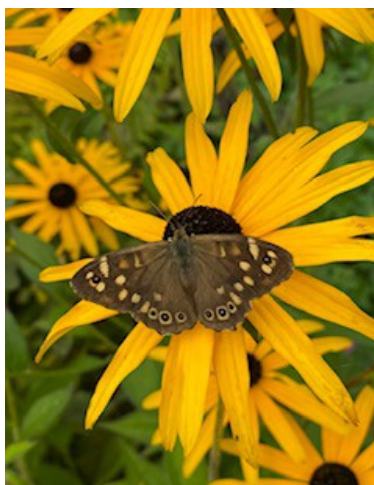


Photo: Sheila Richards

A Home-grown Orchid – *Heather Snow*

I have had this turn up in my Agapanthus pot for the last 4 years, and as you will recognise it's a Marsh Orchid. It just arrived the second year after I had planted the Agapanthus in a pot in the front of my house, so I guess the seed must have been in the soil or bark - what luck! I couldn't believe my eyes, I must have checked a dozen times when I first spotted it. It comes up every year now, so I got in touch with the Hardy Orchid Society seed bank and sent them two consecutive years' flower heads I had preserved in brown paper bags.



Photo: Heather Snow

I have a great love of wild Orchids and have found lots of places over the years, including Martin Down towards Salisbury and Dancing Ledge near Swanage. I have seen the butterfly orchid in the New Forest but funnily enough they didn't show this year at the place I know - but that can be orchids! Our house backs onto Bernard's Mead at Iford, and about 10 years ago autumn lady's tresses appeared, but then the council started to cut the grass all the time and they never came up again.

22/23 Financial Report - Jane Toll (*Treasurer*)

On 1 October 2022, the start of our financial year, there was £11,902.93 in our Lloyds Bank account, plus £15 petty cash. We agreed to ring-fence £3,000 as contingency for unforeseen expenditure, so began the 2022/23 financial year with £8,902.93 available. As reported at AGM 2022, this healthy financial situation was largely due to a bequest of £5,000 from the estate of Miss Jean Beckett.

Income from membership subscriptions raised £1,074 and donations brought in £899, totalling £1,973. Subscriptions were 10% down on 21/22 but donations were nearly double, mainly due to four generous gifts of between £50 and £300 in the name of members who have sadly passed away over the past year. We currently have 159 individual/family subscriptions (including 28 new memberships recorded during this year), and one corporate subscription.

The programme of social activities, so ably organized for many years by Nina Blake, is an important contributor to FOSM's fund-raising, and generated a total of £663.83. The monthly coffee mornings and celebration parties at the Visitor Centre, with their low outgoings raised £356.58. The bird walks and boat trip generated £148.65, and the games evenings, £158.60. There were no evening talks this year; low attendances and increasing hall-hire costs have rendered them unprofitable.

Production and distribution costs for the newsletter were reduced to £152 this year from £896 previously, largely as a result of it now being distributed primarily via email as a PDF, and only a very small number still having to be printed or posted, which has become expensive.

We also expected this year to have to purchase specialist software and support to manage our membership and financial data as we moved to online renewals and payments. However, our Membership Secretary, Amanda Townshend and Treasurer Jane Toll worked to link their databases through Excel, and this negated the need for

further expenditure. The FOSM Website has also undergone a major overhaul at no cost thanks to the hard work and expertise of Dave Woodhead, for which we are very grateful - this includes the ability to join FOSM and renew memberships online, which helps reduce admin work considerably. These cost-saving enhancements of the website, newsletter and administration mean that FOSM's funding support to the Marsh is maximised.

The committee works closely with the BCP Countryside team to identify projects that enhance the safeguarding, understanding and enjoyment of the Marsh. In this way, our financial support is kept aligned with the council's management of the Marsh as a SSSI, and is coordinated with the efforts of other interested groups such as CHOG. We provided camera equipment and traps for the Marsh mammal survey, and financed the annual survey of breeding birds. Expenditure on these projects was £511.14. £1,987.60 of the income from the various bequests was targetted at the replacement Dorothy Baker memorial seat and two more benches for the Marsh. In addition, new signs to delineate the sensitive bird-nesting and feeding areas were purchased for £237.19.

Just over £1,000 was spent on the Visitor Centre this year. The 'open' sign and large map of the Marsh were renewed, and new wildlife posters bought. More flower bulbs have been bought for the garden. FOSM also equipped the Centre with Wi-Fi and new binoculars to facilitate the work of the volunteer Wardens, plus we replaced the kitchen fridge.

In summary, over the 2022/23 financial year FOSM's income was £2,600 and we spent just under £4,000. Because of the recent generous donations and bequests we still have £7,500 available to support future projects. Some existing commitments are being carried into the 2023/24 financial year; these include the carved bench on Riversmeet Meadow and repairs to the Visitors Centre decking, plus funding the annual breeding birds survey. Over coming months we will discuss with the BCP team and volunteer wardens other projects that will further the preservation, understanding and enjoyment of the Marsh.

Children's Activities at Stanpit

- Amanda Townshend

Regular visitors to Stanpit will have noticed that Zena Lee, Lead Volunteer Warden, and other members of the warden team have recently been offering regular "Craft on the Marsh" sessions, typically during the school holidays. This is an opportunity for parents, grandparents and guardians to introduce their children to Stanpit Marsh and our lovely Visitor Centre.

Children can engage with nature and use their crafting skills to make fun items including beautiful model dragon flies, hedgehogs, badgers or fill in nature-themed colouring sheets. The most recent session had a Halloween topic and children enjoyed producing spiders with lovely googly eyes and paper lanterns. Every child and their family went away very happy!

For some years Zena has also organised an annual children's colouring competition at the Centre during the summer holidays. All entries are judged according to their age group, and Zena holds a prize-giving to personally recognise the winners. She says "every year I am told about a special child and what winning has done for them. So, although the competition and prize-giving is a very simple little event, for some children it's been quite an important milestone in their life". The success of these events relies on Zena's enthusiasm and creativity, and we are very grateful to her for the time and effort she puts in to make them happen.

Family FOSM Events - we need your help!

The children's crafting events and colouring competition are open to anyone visiting the Marsh. FOSM supports these events through contributing to the cost materials. In addition, some FOSM members come along to help supervise these activities, but we're always on the lookout for additional people to lend a hand – please leave your details at the Visitor Centre if you can spare an hour or two.

FOSM Committee

Chair:

Alan Hopking

Tel: 01425 613436

anherbking@gmail.com

Treasurer:

Jane Toll

Tel: 01202 259112

janetoll10@gmail.com

Membership Secretary:

Amanda Townshend

Tel: 07502 387953

amandatownshend33@gmail.com

Events Organiser:

Position vacant

Newsletter Coordinator:

Tony Wickham

Tel: 07780 317221

tonywick@gmail.com

Committee Members:

Peter Mearns

Tel: 01202 777139

petermearns90@gmail.com